



Date: June 26, 2012

Topic: US 181/Harbor Bridge Project Site Visit, June 21-22, 2012

Summary: John MacFarlane attended Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Citizen's Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings on June 21, 2012 at the Oveal Williams Senior Center in Corpus Christi, TX. TxDOT presented project background and updates to the committees and requested comments about the public involvement process and alternatives. As part of the presentation, TxDOT announced that the project team had narrowed the reasonable alternatives from six to four and that the purpose and need had been revised. Two alternatives (tunnel and blue) were eliminated from further consideration because they did not meet the basic purpose and need. The need was revised to only include 1) to maintain long-term operation of the bridge and 2) to minimize safety risks. The purpose and need also includes several objectives. These objectives fall under the project need:

- used to evaluate alternatives during the EIS process
- provide transportation infrastructure to expand economic development
- consider connection between the bridge/US 181 and local roadways
- consider ability to meet future traffic demands on US 181

TAC members offered ideas and pros and cons regarding the four alternatives. Members also discussed the desire for the port to be able to accommodate cruise ships, thus requiring an increased bridge height. CAC members expressed frustration on the slow progress of the project. The CAC was generally in favor of the project, with one member expressing that all four alternatives would have adverse impacts to the community. Another member stated that one of the objectives should be that project design is sensitive to the natural and human environment. Members also made suggestions for locations ~~where~~ project information could be disseminated. Most members felt this meeting had presented the same information as the January 2012 meeting.

On June 22, Mr. MacFarlane toured the project area with personnel from TxDOT and FHWA. The team drove the four alternatives and looked at the various resources that may be impacted. Considerable time was spent driving the two neighborhoods that would experience the most direct impacts, Washington Coles and Hillcrest.

Alternatives:

Green: This alternative closely follows the existing alignment. The new bridge would be constructed just to the west of the existing bridge, with the approaches following the existing alignment, but removing the tight curves to improve safety. It would impact estuarine/marine wetlands in the northern portion of the project area. It would impact or displace commercial and

retail structures in the central business and museum districts and structures associated with the port.

Orange: This alternative would be constructed slightly to the west of the existing alignment, veering west of the existing alignment just south of the harbor crossing. It would run just east of Whataburger Field and through the northwest portion of the Washington Coles neighborhood. This alternative would have minimal impacts on residential structures. It would impact estuarine/marine wetlands in the northern portion of the project area. It would impact or displace structures associated with the port.

Red: This alternative would veer to the west of the green and orange alternatives while still north of the harbor. It would cross the harbor and run just west of Whataburger Field. It would run adjacent to a remediated hazardous waste site and would have minimal impact to residential structures. It would impact estuarine/marine wetlands in the northern portion of the project area. It would impact or displace structures associated with the port.

West: This alternative would veer west at the northern project terminus and run across the city's dredge material disposal area. It would cross the harbor and run adjacent to the Flint Hills refinery. Several years ago, the refinery purchased land within the Hillcrest neighborhood for a buffer between the refinery and the neighborhood. The alternative would run through the buffer area until it reaches I-37. It would give ships entering the harbor unrestricted access because it would cross the harbor at least one mile west of the harbor entrance. It would impact estuarine/marine and freshwater emergent wetlands in the northern portion of the project area.

Common to all alternatives are impacts to commercial, residential, and recreational facilities (T.C. Ayers Park, Oveal Williams Senior Center) due to construction of the interchange with I-37 and possibly to historic structures throughout the project area. The West alternative does not appear to impact any recreational facilities.

Critical Issues:

- TxDOT must actively engage and inform the local communities, especially the Washington Coles and Hillcrest neighborhoods, throughout the entire project. TxDOT's public involvement plan includes:
 1. public meetings
 2. CAC/TAC meetings
 3. website
 4. newsletters
 5. neighborhood/small group meetings
- Community Impact Assessment – TxDOT must thoroughly assess the impacts to the affected communities, which includes:
 1. ~~developing~~having an outreach plan for interacting with community groups and individual

2. evaluation of census and other socioeconomic data
3. disseminating questionnaires
4. small group meetings in neighborhood locations in the summer/fall 2012

Timeline:

Fall 2012 – CAC and TAC meeting

Winter 2012 – Public Meeting

Spring 2013 – Draft EIS

Summer 2013 – Public Meeting, Design Guideline Workshop

2014 – Public Hearing

2014 - 2015 – Final EIS

2016 - 2018 – Begin construction

Status:

- Community Impact Assessment has begun
- * data gathering and research for the Affected Environment chapter of the Draft EIS has begun

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